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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine where a sample of English language arts teachers, identified as educational leaders, get their ideas. Twenty-five English language arts teachers agreed to participate in the study which took the form of a 10-item survey. Five items dealt with trivial knowledge about language conventions and five items required teachers to describe continually successful teaching practices. Results indicated that these 25 teachers tended to trace their trivial knowledge of language conventions to teachers they had once had and that they continued to use this knowledge in teaching their own classes. They did not rely on their own teachers for the development of what they perceived to be continually successful teaching ideas. Rather, these teachers tended to claim original creation. A sub-sample of 10 teachers was drawn from the original 25 (the five most and five least experienced) to determine whether these subgroups drew their teaching ideas from the same sources, whether the nature of the teaching ideas between the two groups was different, and whether their ideas labeled as "original creation" were perceived as being original by their peers. Results indicated that the two groups perceived that sources for teaching activities were distributed in a similar way and that both groups cited "original creation" as the most frequently used sources of ideas. To test whether claims of originality were warranted, a sample of 10 purportedly original ideas was submitted to a panel of 23 teachers under the guise of a "teaching idea contest," where prizes were to be awarded for originality. Results indicated that in none of the 10 cases did a majority of the judges determine that the idea was original. (Seven tables of data are included and nine references are attached.) (MG)

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WHERE ENGLISH TEACHERS GET THEIR IDEAS: TRIVIAL KNOWLEDGE VS. SUCCESSFUL TEACHING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

Unlike mathematics and science, the English language arts is an amorphous subject, one with little inherent structure. As a result teachers potentially have broad discretionary powers in selecting course content and learning activities. Evidence suggests that English teachers are not guided by research and theory generated at Schools of Education. They are, more likely, influenced by the textbooks and teachers manuals adopted by their respective districts. Still, large numbers of English teachers continue to draw their ideas from sources outside the world of theory and research, on the one hand, and the world of publishing, on the other. Professional literature suggests that these sources include lore, staff development workshops, and original creation. The purpose of this study is to determine where a sample of English language arts teachers who are identified as educational leaders get their ideas. For the purposes of this study, ideas were defined as (a) trivial information about language conventions and (b) continually successful classroom activities. Twenty-five English language arts teachers, identified as educational leaders to be trained at a special summer workshop at the University, agreed to participate in the study. The study took the form of a ten-item survey. Five items dealt with trivial knowledge about language conventions, generated from a brainstorming session and discussion the researcher had with three colleagues and seven graduate students in English education. Five items required teachers to describe

continually successful teaching practices. With respect to the ten items, the experimenter tried to determine not only what knowledge the teachers possessed and what continually successful classroom activities they used but also the sources for these ideas. Results from the survey indicated that these 25 English teachers tended to trace their trivial knowledge of language conventions to teachers they had once had and that they continued to use this knowledge in teaching their own classes. Conversely, they did not rely on their own teachers for the development of what they perceived to be continually successful teaching ideas. Rather, these teachers tended to claim original creation.

A sub-sample of ten teachers was drawn from the original sample of 25, the five most experienced teachers and the five least experienced teachers. The researcher wanted to test (a) whether these two subgroups drew their teaching ideas from the same sources, (b) whether the nature of the teaching ideas between the two groups was different, and (c) whether their ideas labeled as "original creation" were perceived as being original by their peers. (a) It was determined that experienced teachers' perceived sources for teaching activities were distributed in a similar way to those of less experienced teachers. Both experienced and inexperienced teachers cited "original creation" as the most frequently used source of ideas. Also, neither group drew on their own teachers as sources for ideas. (b) In determining whether the nature of the teaching ideas of more experienced versus less experienced teachers were different, the researcher gave a group of ten school administrators a sample of ten teaching activities from the pool of experienced teachers and a sample of ten teaching activities from the pool of inexperienced teachers. Administrators were told to read the activity and, based on their experience, indicate whether the teaching

activity came from an inexperienced or an experienced teacher. In only four instances did a majority of administrators correctly identify a teaching activity as having been generated either by an experienced or inexperienced teachers. In 11 instances, a majority of administrators incorrectly identified a teaching activity as having been generated either by an experienced or inexperienced teacher. (c) To test whether claims to originality were warranted, the researcher submitted a sample of ten of these purportedly original ideas to a panel of 23 English arts teachers under the guise of a "Teaching Idea Contest," where prizes were to be awarded for originality. The 23 teachers were to judge the originality of the ideas using three criteria: (1) they had not heard or observed the activity, (2) they had not read about the idea, and (3) they had not used the idea in their own classrooms. Results indicated that in none of the ten cases did a majority of the 23 judges determine that the idea was original.

WHERE ENGLISH TEACHERS GET THEIR IDEAS: TRIVIAL KNOWLEDGE VS. SUCCESSFUL TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Background

George H. Henry, Professor Emeritus at the University of Delaware, has been an English educator for nearly half a century. In describing the subject English, he writes:

> Because English has no inherent structure or system to understand, as do mathematics and the sciences, the teacher of language is permitted great freedom of arrangement and variety of methodology (Henry, 1986, p. 17).

In fact, given a variety of philosophies of teaching literature, language, and composition, and numerous teaching strategies (e.g., Joyce & Weil, 1986) with which to implement those philosophies, a statistician could argue that it is possible for an English teacher to choose from nearly fifty thousand ways to build a language arts lesson around one work of literature, say, Robert Frost's "Death of the Hired Man." With an abundance of potential lesson resources, where do English teachers go for ideas?

The Limited Role of Research and Theory

One common inference is that English teachers do not consult research and theory. Margaret Early (1986) laments that the professional school, where knowledge about theory and research is usually based, has little influence on classroom practice. Early describes what she perceives as a common pattern: The English language arts teacher is introduced to classroom teaching with only one methods class as background. Subsequently, he or she relies on ideas from a department chair, with a similarly limited background, or from district supervisors. Not only is the influence of the university professional school ephemeral and tangential, but there may also be a natural alienation between practicing teachers on the one hand and theory and research on the other. Practicing teachers tend not to read research journals, where data from new studies are continually reported. Glatthorn, Hatala, and Moore (1986) note that the subscription rate for Research in the Teaching of English was seven percent of that of English Journal, a periodical addressed to secondary school English teachers on "practical" issues. The problem is one of audience appeal. Educational research is generally reported in forms which many teachers find unpalatable, that is, heavy on data analysis and light on classroom application. Also, as Stephen North (1987) suggests, practitioners approach classroom problems differently from experimentalists or ethnographers. A troubled teacher will in most situations consult colleagues rather than journals or class notes. Talk, not reading, becomes the base from which practitioners tend to get new ideas. Researchers, on the other hand, anchor their studies in bodies of theoretical and empirical literature. Consequently, it is the atypical teacher who consults research for teaching ideas.

Commercial Texts and Materials

If English teachers are not influenced by professional schools, research, and theory, what are their sources for ideas? One suggestion is that teachers are heavily influenced by district adopted textbooks, accompanying instructional manuals, and commercially prepared supplementary materials, such as workbooks and worksheets. Based on his extensive observation of practices in a national sample of 38 schools, John Goodlad (1984) observed that English teachers were text-bound. In other words, they relied heavily on commercially prepared texts and supplementary materials, which, Goodlad inferred, accounted for the repetitive and basic nature of much of the observed instruction. Goodlad noted only rare exceptions where instruction was neither text-and-test based nor focused on the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills.

Tradition and Lore

Another notion is that English teachers get ideas from one another. This exchange occurs both informally in hallways and faculty lounges as well as formally at faculty meetings and conferences. North equates pedagogical lore with a large, rambling house, the result of continual and architecturally incompatible additions--all seemingly connected. Lore, then, is a collection of all teaching ideas and practices that, at one time or another, have "worked" for at least one teacher. Lore is based on talk and talk is, of course, more accessible than professional schools, research, or theory. So, if Teacher A is having problems with Student B or Situation C, Teachers X, Y and Z, who have had problems with the same student or situation, can offer solutions that "worked" for them. All teacher A needs to do is try out the advice and see if it "works" again. If it works, it

will probably be added to Teacher A's repertoire. If it doesn't, it will be discarded and A will consult other teachers. The immediate application of one teacher's ideas to another teacher's classroom is what North refers to as ritual.

Staff Development Workshops

A fourth possible source for teacher ideas is the staff development workshop. Since Berman and McLaughlin's (1977) landmark study of 297 federally funded educational projects, school districts throughout the country have attempted to emulate the characteristics of those projects which brought about permanent and satisfying change in teacher behavior and curriculum. Sometimes these efforts have been inspired by university-based research and development. Some projects, for example, involved monitoring teachers' concerns about trying out new ideas (Hall and Loucks, 1978) or grouping teachers into peer-coaching teams (Joyce and Showers, 1983). Other efforts have been less-inspired but more charismatic, even theatrical. Where collective bargaining is mandated, teachers' contracts frequently require participation in district-wide staff development programs. So, in contrast to a decade ago, teachers are more likely to acquire new ideas through staff development programs, either because they are required to do so by their administration or because the workshop has introduced them to something they think will work.

The staff development workshop, then, covers a range of idea sources, depending upon who presents it. Some workshops are directed by practitioners who share their presumably successful teaching methods in either one-shot or multiple-session settings. Some of these ideas may be theory or research based; others may be based in lore. Some workshops focus

on retraining groups of teachers in complicated instructional strategies or classroom management systems. These are generally theory or research based, although some educators may find the research faulty or the theory incomplete.

Original Creation

Some teachers create their own teaching activities, at least that is the assumption not only of teachers who write articles for practitioners' journals and "idea books" but also of the editors of these publications. Whether any teaching idea is original can be the subject of an extended philosophical argument. For example, North (1987) maintains that for a teacher to make a contribution to knowledge, or lore, one of three criteria must be present: (1) the adaptation of existent strategies to a new purpose or use, (2) the development of a new approach because traditional approaches do not work, and (3) when a nonstandard situation demands a nonstandard approach. What is germane in this study is that teachers may perceive that they make original contributions to what North calls lore. Whether they do or not can be independently assessed.

The Study

Given five data sources for teachers' ideas, the researcher wanted to determine which of these sources teachers draw most heavily on: (1) theory and research, (2) district adopted textbooks, manuals, and supplementary materials, (3) lore, (4) workshops, or (5) original creation. Two kinds of "ideas" were selected as a basis for this analysis: (1) trivial knowledge and (2) teaching activities that are considered by teachers to be continually successful.

Trivial Knowledge

English language arts teachers are legend for supplying their students with numerous rules, rhymes, and other mnemonic devices with which to retain processes for spelling, word formation, or technical definitions. This assertion emerged in an informal discussion the researcher held with three colleagues and seven graduate students in English education. The discussion began with brainstorming rules, mnemonic devices, and examples related to English language conventions. After the brainstorming, the researcher took a frequency count on how many of the individuals in the discussion had learned that specific language convention through a particular rule, device, or example. The five most frequently recurring items were selected for the teacher survey. These were the items:

1. The definition of preposition
2. The spelling rule for words with the letters c, e, and i in close proximity
3. The example used when explaining the difference between a simile and a metaphor
4. The memory device for differentiating homonyms principal and principle
5. The example used when differentiating the spelling of its vs. it's.

1. Definition of a Preposition. Most of the individuals in the informal discussion concluded that they had never learned the formal definition of a preposition but rather learned the function of a preposition through an example, such as, "anything a rabbit can do to two mountains" or "anything a cat can do to two pieces of furniture." The expectation was that

when asked to define a preposition most English language arts teachers would define it by example and that they would attribute the examples to lore, that is to teachers or parents.

2. Spelling with c, e, and i. Everyone in the informal discussion recalled some rhymed rule for spelling words with c, e, and i in close proximity. The range was from "i before e except after c" to the more elaborate "i before e except after c or when sounded like a as in neighbor and weigh. The expectation was that every English language arts teacher would have a variant of this rhyme and, like the participants in the informal discussion, would have learned the rule from lore, from either a parent or close relative or a teacher, although the rule appears occasionally in language arts books.

3. Example Used in Differentiating Simile and Metaphor. Most of the individuals in the informal discussion remembered learning the difference between simile and metaphor through the example "My love is like a red, red rose" vs. "My love is a red, red rose." The expectation was that English language arts teachers would have remembered the differentiation between the two closely related figures of speech through the "rose" example and that they would attribute it to lore.

4. Memory Device for Differentiating principal from principle. Individuals in the informal discussion all remembered learning to spell principal vs. principle by using the mnemonic device "The principal is your pal." The expectation was that English language arts teachers would have remembered that specific

example and would attribute it to lore.

5. Example Used in Differentiating the Spelling of its vs. it's. A majority of the participants of the informal discussion identified a mnemonic device they had learned for differentiating the possessive case pronoun its from the contraction it's. Most of the devices included a sentence where the wrong word was humorously used. For example, one participant recalled a sixth-grade teacher telling him that "You certainly wouldn't say 'The cat licked it is paw.'" The expectation was that the English language arts teachers would produce sentences where the humorous use of it's would appear in an illogical sentence and that when teachers were asked to identify the source of this knowledge, they would attribute it to lore.

Continually Successful Teaching Activities

The researcher wanted to determine not only sources for trivial knowledge but also sources for, in a more complex vein, teaching ideas that had, in individual teachers' perceptions, been continually successful. According to North, practitioners tend to use and reuse those activities that "work" in their own classrooms. Items 5 through 10 then, asked teachers to describe their five most continually successful teaching activities and to identify the sources from which these activities came.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of ten items. Items 1 through 5 directed teachers to recall certain trivial information: e.g., "When you

first learned parts of speech, what do you recall was the first definition of preposition that you learned? If possible reconstruct the exact words as you first learned then." Next the teachers were asked to recall the original source of this information. Seven options were provided representing four categories of origin: (1) theory/research, (2) district adopted textbooks and supplementary materials, (3) lore and (4) staff development workshop. The nature of these items precluded the use of original creation as a possible option. That is, it would be impossible for teachers to recall something they had learned and invented at the same time.

	Source	Type
1.	a teacher I had, grades (K-12)	Lore
2.	a parent or relative	Lore
3.	a book or article	Textbooks/materials
4.	a colleague with whom I worked	Lore
5.	a college professor or university course	Theory/Research
6.	a pre-service or in-service workshop	Workshop
7.	Other	Various

In addition to the source, the researcher was interested in determining whether English language arts teachers used this trivial knowledge in their own teaching: e.g., "Have you used this definition in your own teaching?" Three options were provided:

a. No, because I haven't taught content that used it

b. No, because I use other ways of explaining it

c. Yes, I have used it

Items 6-10 directed teachers to describe what they perceived to be their five most repeatedly successful teaching activities. To clarify the concept "activity" I provided positive and negative examples of how an activity should be described:

A

YES Using discussion clusters, I have each cluster focus on one character in a story and answer questions related to that character.

NO I have students discuss literature selections in small groups.

B

YES I stage a mock confrontation between me and a student, then have the class write about it from their specific points of view in the room.

NO I have students write from specific points of view.

C

YES I put groups of students together in different corners of the room. Each group has cards with word stems, prefixes and suffixes. Groups compete for points by assembling adjectives and adverbs.

NO I use high motivational activities in teaching vocabulary.

After describing each activity, teachers were directed to select from seven options the source of the activity, whether they copied or adapted the activity. The options represented four of the five types of idea sources. In constructing the options, textbooks and materials was deleted because researchers felt that teachers in this sample would not openly admit to borrowing ideas from their own textbooks and would purposely avoid that response. However, the option Other provided the category where teachers could, if they wished, identify textbooks as sources for their ideas. What follows are the source options which teachers could use to describe the sources for their continually successful teaching activities:

Source	Type
1. a K-12 teacher that I had	Lore
2. a colleague that I work(ed) with	Lore
3. a college or university course I took	Research/theory
4. a book or article that I read not related to a college or university course	Research/theory
5. a pre-service or in-service workshop	Workshop
6. original creation, invention	Original
7. other (explain)	Various

The Sample

Every other summer, the University sponsors a summer workshop for area English language arts teachers. Participation is invitational, based on outstanding teaching practices as documented in support letters written by school administrators. Twenty-five teachers were selected to participate in last summer's workshop. They represented all grade levels, pre-school through senior high school. The researcher administered the survey during the third week of the five-week workshop.

Analysis of Survey Data

Trivial Knowledge. A majority of the English language arts teachers surveyed cited their own teachers as sources for all five items of trivial knowledge. With 24 teachers responding to 5 items, there were 72 out of a possible 120 instances where teachers identified their own teachers as sources of trivial knowledge, an average of 14.4 teachers per item. This most frequent teacher-as-source occurred in the definition of preposition and in i before (N 19). The least frequent teacher-as-source occurred in principal/principle (N 8). None of the other ideas sources were cited to any appreciable degree. Also, these teachers tended to use this same trivial information in their own classes. There are 80 instances in which teachers reported they had used trivial information in their classes just as they had learned it (an average of 16 teachers per item). The most frequent use was its/it's (N 22); the least frequent use was the definition of preposition (N 7). In effect, with regard to the learning of trivial knowledge of at least five points of language conventions appears to be firmly rooted in lore. Table 1 reports the frequency distribution of attributed sources for trivial knowledge about five language conventions and

teachers' use of that knowledge in their own classrooms.

(Insert Table Table 1 about here.)

Continually Successful Teaching Activities. In analyzing the survey data, the researcher was primarily concerned with the sources of the activities, rather than the activities themselves. Results of the data on "sources" subsequently led back to the specific activities--as will be discussed later. A frequency distribution was done on each of the seven possible options for each of the five activities and on the total activities. The data appear in the Table 2.

(Insert Table 2 about here.)

Looking at the total survey, one can see that the most heavily used source is original creation. With 25 teachers reporting on five activities each, 40 activities out of a possible 125 were attributed to original creation. Other popular sources were workshops (20) and colleagues (20). No activities were attributed to the respondents' own teachers. In contrast to trivial knowledge about certain language conventions, original creation was more important than lore as an idea source.

More Experienced Teachers Versus Less Experienced Teachers

Since the years of teaching experience of the sample ranged from one year to 18 years, the researcher wanted to determine whether length of experience influenced where teachers drew ideas for teaching activities. For example, Berman and McLaughlin (1977) had claimed that teachers of five years experience or more tended to be unchanging in their teaching style and

repertoire. This would suggest that teachers of less than five years experience would be more exploratory and more varied in their idea sources than would experienced teachers. Two groups of five teachers were drawn from the larger sample of 25 participating teachers. The five most experienced teachers had a total of 67 years teaching experience, an average of 13.4 years, with a range from 11 to 18 years. The five least experienced teachers had a total of 11 years teaching experience, an average of 2.2 years, with a range from 1 year to 3 years. Each of these ten teachers had described five activities perceived of as being "continually successful." To determine differences in teaching activities and the sources of these activities, the researcher compared the responses of the two groups, seeking answers to three questions:

1. Do less experienced teachers draw ideas for teaching activities from the same sources as do teachers with more experience?
2. Are the activities described by less experienced teachers different in nature from those described by more experienced teachers?
3. Are the ideas that less experienced teachers claim to be original and the ideas that more experienced teachers claim to be original perceived as original by peers, that is, other English language arts teachers?

1. <u>Sources for Teaching Ideas.</u> Each of the ten teachers in the sub-sample had described five activities perceived as being "continually successful." The researcher wanted to determine whether less experienced teachers in this subgroup drew their teaching ideas from the same sources as did more experienced teachers. Since each teaching idea was to be attributed to one of

seven possible sources, it was possible to do a frequency distribution of idea sources and compare those of less experienced teachers with those of experienced teachers. Table 3 reports these data.

(Insert Table 3 about here.)

As the data in Table 3 indicate, four of the seven data sources were drawn on equally by less as well as more experienced teachers. None of the teachers in either group used their own teachers as data sources. On the other hand, the most heavily attributed source with both groups was original creation. Although three times as many activities from experienced teachers were attributed to workshops than from inexperienced teachers, that difference can be explained by the fact that experienced teachers would, by nature, have attended more workshops than less experienced teachers. In effect, based on this sample of teachers, less experienced teachers use the same idea sources in the same frequency as do more experienced teachers.

2. The Nature of Teaching Activities. Next, the researcher wanted to determine whether the nature of teaching ideas of inexperienced teachers differed from that of more experienced teachers. To test this question, the researcher drew a random sample of 20 teaching ideas, 10 from the list of 25 activities compiled from less experienced teachers and 10 from the list of 25 activities compiled from more experienced teachers. The 20 ideas were compiled into a booklet and presented to a group of 10 administrators who had taken

course-work in instructional evaluation and who were currently enrolled in an advanced seminar in school administration methodology. The administrators were given the following instructions: Here is a booklet containing 20 teaching activities that teachers have actually used in classroom teaching. Some of the activities were authored by teachers with more than ten years of experience; some of the ideas were authored by teachers with three years experience or less. On the basis of your experience, indicate which of these activities were generated by experienced teachers, those with more than ten years of experience. Place a large E to the right of the description of these teaching activities. Also, indicate which of these activities were generated by inexperienced teachers, those teachers with three or fewer years of experience. Place a large I to the right of the description of these teaching activities.

A frequency distribution of administrator assigned Es and Is was done on each of the 20 teaching activities, to determine whether there was a perceived difference between the activities described by less experienced teachers and those described by more experienced teachers. These data are reported in Table 4.

(Insert Tables 4, 5 and 5A about here.)

As Table 4 indicates, administrators correctly identified a teaching activity as having been generated from an experienced teacher in less than half of the instances, that is in 45 out of a possible 1000 instances. In only two instances (Activities 7 and

9) did a majority of administrators correctly identify an activity as having been generated by an experienced teacher. As Table 5 indicates, school administrators correctly identified a teaching activity as having been generated by an inexperienced teacher in only 39 out of a possible 100 instances. Again, in only two instances (Activities 4 and 6) did a majority of administrators concur on a correctly identified activity. As Table 5A indicates, out of a possible 200 instances, trained administrators correctly identified activities as having been generated by experienced as opposed to inexperienced teachers in 85 instances. Only one administrator made correct identifications more than half the time.

The Question of Originality. The researcher examined those activities that were claimed by both experienced and inexperienced teachers to be original. Several activities sounded familiar to the researcher. He had used one of the "original" activities in his own high school English classroom two decades earlier. For example, one teacher described a writing assignment in which she had students invent a product and then develop an advertising campaign for it. The researcher had used the identical activity as a final examination for a unit on propaganda which he had taught in spring of 1965 and spring of 1966. Investigators located some other "inventions" appeared in journal articles.

Since the researcher's own experience led him to doubt what some teachers perceived as "original creation," he decided to test the originality of these "inventions." A stratified random sample of 20 activities were drawn from the set of 50 activities described by the 5 most experienced teachers and the 5 least experienced teachers. Five purportedly original and 5 purportedly derived teaching activities were drawn from both

those activities supplied by the 5 most experienced and the 5 least experienced teachers. These activities were scrambled and randomly sequenced in a booklet which was presented to a group of 23 language arts teachers attending a workshop. The teachers were given these instructions: "The National Educational Society is sponsoring a competition for 'Most Original Teaching Idea.' A large cash prize will be awarded. A group of judges has eliminated from competition all but 20 entries. Since the final judges feel that they cannot adequately judge originality, you have been selected as a screening committee to recommend to the judges which of the ideas are original and which are borrowed or derived from other sources. Originality is established if a teaching activity meets all of the following three criteria:

1. To my knowledge I have never read about this activity.
2. To my knowledge I have never heard about or observed this activity.
3. To my knowledge, I have never used this activity in teaching.

Read each activity. If the activity meets all three of the criteria, place a large O to the right of the activity's description. If the activity fails to meet all three criteria, place a large U to the right of the activity's description.

The booklets were collected and a frequency distribution of teacher assigned Os and Us was done to determine how many of the ideas that had been described as original were viewed as such by a panel of peers. The data for this analysis appear in Tables 6 and 7.

(Insert Tables 6 and 7 about here.)

Several generalizations can be drawn from the data in Tables 6 and 7.

Purportedly Original Activities. Of the 20 activities presented to a panel of 23 English language arts teachers, 10 were purportedly original. According to data in Table 6, in only 40 out of 230 possible instances did teachers correctly identify a purportedly original idea. In no instance did a majority of these peers rate a purportedly original idea as original. Furthermore, in five activities, no judges rated a purportedly original idea as original. The number of judges determining a purportedly original activity to be original ranged from 0 to 11, with an average of 4 judges per item. In effect, there appeared to be little agreement as to what constituted an original teaching activity.

Purportedly Derived or Borrowed Teaching Activities. Of the 20 items presented to the panel of 23 language arts teachers, 10 were purportedly unoriginal, that is, derived or borrowed. Data from Table 7 indicate that out of 228 (two respondents failed to evaluate one item each) possible instances, teachers correctly identified teaching activities as unoriginal 173 times. With all ten instances, a majority of judges rated an unoriginal idea as unoriginal, a range from 14 to 20 with an average of 17.3. On the whole, judges tended to agree that a purportedly unoriginal idea was unoriginal.

The Dubious Concept of Originality. Interestingly, there was no unanimous agreement that a purportedly unoriginal idea was unoriginal; whereas, as noted earlier, there was unanimous agreement that five purportedly original ideas were unoriginal. Based on the teachers' responses to the origins of their colleagues teaching ideas, there appears to be a general reluctance to accept any teaching idea as original. Perhaps, as cynics suggest, there is "nothing new under the sun."

Close-Up of Three Teaching Activities. Given general disagreement on what constitutes an original teaching activity and somewhat more general agreement on what constitutes an unoriginal idea, the researcher took a closer look at three activities from the sample of 20: (1) the purportedly original idea receiving the highest degree of agreement from the 23 judges, (2) a purportedly original idea that all 23 judges rated as unoriginal, and (3) a purportedly unoriginal idea rated by some judges as original and some judges as unoriginal.

Teaching Activity 3. Purportedly original. Eleven judges rated it original; 12 judges rated it unoriginal. The activity involved students selecting pictures, pasting them on paper in a sequence, and justifying the sequence. Of the 12 judges rating this idea as unoriginal, 6 claimed they had used the activity in their own classes, 5 claimed they had read about the activity, and 9 claimed they had heard about the activity somewhere. Five judges used a single criterion for determining unoriginality, 6 judges used 2 criteria, and one judge used all 3 criteria.

Teaching Activity 1. Purportedly Original. All 23 judges rated it as unoriginal. This activity involved students writing their own books and having their peers read and react to them. Twelve judges claimed they had used this activity in their own classes. Seventeen judges indicated that they had read about this activity. Fifteen judges claimed that they had heard about the activity somewhere.

Five judges used a single criterion for determining the unoriginality of the activity. Thirteen judges used two criteria. Five judges used all three criteria.

Teaching Activity 8. Purportedly unoriginal. Nine judges rated it as original; 14 claimed it was unoriginal. This activity involves students working on spelling in partnership. One student dictates sentences with spelling words; the other student writes out the sentences. Of the 14 teachers who claimed this to be an unoriginal activity, 6 indicated that they had used the activity in their own classrooms, 11 noted that they had heard about the activity somewhere, and 2 teachers claimed that they had read about that activity somewhere. Ten teachers used one criterion in determining the unoriginality of the activity, three teachers used two criteria, and one teacher used all three criteria.

Conclusions

This study has attempted to describe some possible conditions that exist in the field of English language arts teaching, a field with a low degree of structure and a high degree of ambiguity. First, lore may well be alive and thriving in the profession, as evidenced not only by teachers' tendency to pass on learned mnemonic devices to their own students but also to borrow freely from the ideas of other teachers. Second, even trained administrators cannot perceive differences in the way experienced versus inexperienced language arts teachers describe what they do in the

classroom. This may suggest that administrators are at a loss to conceptualize how English language arts teachers respond to the demands of the curriculum. Third, English language arts teachers tend to claim originality for the majority of their successful teaching practices, when, in fact, these ideas may not be original.

This survey raises questions for further investigation. Since this study focused on a cluster of 25 English language arts teachers perceived as leaders in their field, is their behavior typical of all English teachers? A future study would correlate the findings of this study with a random sample of English language arts teachers drawn from the population. Once this sample were drawn, additional questions could be pursued. For example, do English language arts teachers in the general population learn mnemonic devices for retaining rules about language conventions from their own teachers and pass them on to their students? Do English language arts teachers in the larger population eschew formal sources of ideas--professional literature, formal courses--in favor of informal sources--personal imagination, colleagues, and "practical" workshops? Is there, in fact, little perceived difference in the way experienced and inexperienced language arts teachers describe their inexperienced language arts teachers describe their most successful teaching practices? Do English language arts teachers in the general population claim to be the originators of ideas that are not, in fact, original?

As was pointed out at the beginning of this study, English language arts is a most complicated subject, in which teachers have almost unlimited freedom in selecting content and teaching method. How these teachers function in their classrooms continues to be a source of mystery to administrators and researchers alike. It is hoped that this study can shed

some light on a systematic approach of examining one small aspect of the conduct of English language arts teaching, specifically, where teachers get their ideas.

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Table 1. Frequency of Attributed Sources for 24 English Language Arts Teachers' Trivial Knowledge about Five Language Conventions and the Use of That Knowledge in Their Classrooms

Language	SOURCE							USE		
Convention	Tr	Par	Bk/Art	Col	Prof	Wkshp	Oth	N	N/Adp	Y
Def. of Preposition	19	0	2	2	0	0	1	7	9	7
i before e	19	1	0	1	1	0	1	3	1	20
metaphor vs. simile	11	1	7	0	3	0	1	5	6	12
principal vs. principle	8	1	3	1	2	0	9	4	1	19
its vs. it's	15	0	6	0	0	0	3	1	1	22
Total	72	3	18	4	6	0	15	20	18	80
Mean	14.4	0.6	3.6	0.8	1.2	0	3	4	3.6	16

Table 2. Frequency of Attributed Sources for English Language Arts Teachers' Repeatedly Successful Teaching Activities

	SOURCE						
ACTIVITY	Teach	BK/art col	Prof/Cse	Wkshp	Orig	Other	No Resp
1	0	4	3	1	4	8	4	1
2	0	0	5	4	4	10	1	1
3	0	2	2	4	4	11	2	0
4	0	5	4	3	4	6	1	2
5	0	3	6	5	4	5	1	1
Total	0	14	20	17	20	40	9	5
Mean	0	2.8	4.0	3.4	4	8.0	1.8	1.0

Table 3. Frequency distribution by source of 50 "continually successful teaching activities used by the 5 most experienced teachers and 5 least experienced teachers drawn from a sample of 25 English language arts teachers attending a summer workshop

SOURCE	N Teaching Activities	
	Most Experienced N 5	Least Experienced N 5
1. A K-12 teacher I had	0	0
2. A colleague I work(ed) with	2	3
3. A college or university course I took	4	4
4. A book or article I read not related to college course	0	3
5. Pre-service or in-service workshop	6	2
6. Original creation	10	10
7. Other	3	3
Total	25	25

Table 4. Ten administrators' verifications of ten teaching activities of experienced teachers

Activity	N Administrators Indicating E	N Administrators Indicating I
1	5	5
2	5	5
3	3	7
4	4	6
5	3	7
6	3	7
7	7	3
8	5	5
9	7	3
10	3	7
Total	45	55
Mean	4.5	5.5

Table 5. Ten administrators' verifications of ten teaching activities of inexperienced teachers

Activity	N Administrators Indicating E	N Administrators Indicating I
1	10	0
2	7	3
3	5	5
4	2	8
5	7	3
6	4	6
7	7	3
8	5	5
9	6	4
10	8	2
Total	61	39
Mean	6.1	3.9

Table 5A. Number of correct responses out of 20 by 10 administrators identifying activities as generated from experienced versus inexperienced teachers

Administrator	Number of Correct Responses		
	E	I	Total
1	3	4	7
2	3	5	8
3	5	4	[illegible]
4	4	4	8
5	3	5	8
6	5	3	8
7	3	5	8
8	4	3	7
9	8	2	10
10	7	4	11
Total	45	39	84
Mean	4.5	3.9	8.4

Table 6. 23 English language arts teachers' verifications ten purportedly original teaching ideas

Activity	N Teachers Labeling O	N Teachers Labeling U
1	0	23
2	11	12
3	9	14
4	0	23
5	10	13
6	8	15
7	2	21
8	0	23
9	0	23
10	0	23
Total	40	190
Mean	4.0	19.0

Table 7. 23 English language arts teachers' verifications 10 purportedly unoriginal teaching ideas

Activity	N Teachers Labeling O	N Teachers Labeling U
1	3	19
2	3	20
3	9	14
4	6	16
5	7	16
6	6	17
7	3	20
8	5	18
9	8	15
10	5	18
Total	55	173
Mean	5.5	17.3